

Lectionary readings: Isaiah 43: 16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 3: 4b-14; John 12: 1-8 (Fifth in Lent)

For reflection and prayer

- **Isaiah 43:** Isaiah reminds the people of how God had delivered their ancestors from Egypt. But that is nothing to what God is going to do in delivering His people from exile. What new thing might God be wanting to do for us this year? Nothing is impossible for God. Are we stuck in the past? Here is what God says: *'Forget about what's happened; don't keep going over old history. Be alert; be present. I'm about to do something brand new.'* If we are to see what God is doing, we need to be present to where we are, for God operates in the here and now. Let us each allow God to open our eyes to His presence and to the miracles of grace that He wants to do in each one of our lives.
- **Psalm 126:** This Psalm speaks of the joy God's people experienced at being brought back to their own land after exile. Even foreigners marvelled at the amazing things the Lord had done. Can each one of us say, 'God has done amazing things for me'? If so, let this be a week of rejoicing and giving thanks as we recall all that God has done for us. And let us open our lives to God so that He can go on delivering us from whatever bondages we need to be delivered from and lead us to a greater measure of wholeness, so that others can see the amazing things God is doing in our lives.
- **Philippians 3:** Paul says that there is only one thing that is of real and lasting significance - knowing Christ, being one with Him, experiencing His love and power

in our lives. Is that our goal? To know God more and more intimately? The Message puts it beautifully, I think: *'...embrace Christ and be embraced by Him.'* (verse 9) Let that touch our heart and lead us into prayer so that, like Paul, we press on, allowing no one and nothing to distract us from our goal - the prize of our true self, transformed and made new through being embraced by Christ. This means blessing for ourselves and blessing for all those whose lives God touches through us.

- **John 12:** Jesus knows that emotions are running high and that He is moving towards His death. How lovely for Him to be in the home of close friends, whom He loves and who love Him. Mary performs an act of selfless generosity - anointing Jesus' feet with very expensive oil (representing a whole year's wages) in preparation for Jesus' burial - not that Mary would have known that was what she was doing, but that is how Jesus saw it. And Jesus accepted that act of self-giving love, as He accepts every gesture of love we offer Him. Whatever we give to Jesus is transformed in His hands - made new. So if we offer Him our pain, He can turn that into blessing; if we offer Him the dry areas of our life, He can transform these into fruitfulness. He can turn our fear into faith, our sadness into joy. As Isaiah reminded us, God wants to do a new thing in each one of our lives. Let's allow Him to do that this week.

A prayer

Stretch wide my heart to embrace You, Lord, so that I may experience this new thing that You want to do in my life. Lord, You are pure Love, and to be my true self I have to become like You, my heavenly Father. Amen.